

Attention to DE-TAIL

Maintenance and servicing of vehicles is paramount to ensure they stay on the road. But what about when it comes to ancillary components, such as tail-lifts? John Challen finds out from the people who look after them where the responsibility lies

While they make little or no difference to how a vehicle drives or performs, tail-lifts that are broken or malfunctioning are a headache to transport operators. The inability to unload a truck because the platform doesn't deploy, or isn't safe to use, can render a journey redundant and costly, so it's essential to operations that tail-lifts are properly maintained and serviced.

For Cliff Reeder, director at Humberside Tail-lifts, there is no doubt where the responsibility lies. "The maintenance of a tail-lift falls with the end user and the owner of the vehicle. However, tail-lifts are different to the vehicles themselves because they are not subjected to six-weekly inspections; nor are MOTs legal requirements." What is legally required, however, is a statutory thorough examination - as part of the LOLER regulations - every six months.

But the certification isn't in the same vein as an MOT, says Reeder. "Those people pulling a vehicle over wouldn't insist on seeing any documentation relating to the actual LOLER report," he says. "The only time that would kick in was if drivers were operating the lift and they were hurt. This would mean that the Health and Safety Executive would step

in and ask to see the LOLER report. If the report showed evidence of a defect and the owner couldn't supply evidence that the defects had been put right, there would be a problem. So it is in the owner's best interests to make sure everything works."

As an independent, all-makes service and maintenance provider for tail-lifts, Humberside Tail-lifts treats customers who need LOLER tests in the same way as those requiring vehicle inspections. "We will naturally give them prompts, but it is up to them to ensure the work

gets done," says Reeder, who states there are a range of maintenance options.

ARE YOU FEELING COMPETENT?

According to the LOLER literature, the inspections have to be undertaken by 'a competent person'. Sounds a bit vague? Reeder agrees. "It isn't as grey as it sounds - it's far worse than that! I think it's fair to say that the LOLER regulation, which came out in 1998, is just one big grey document, full stop."

Fortunately, Reeder says his company





BEST PRACTICE SUMMARY

- Assess how you will use the tail-lift safely
- Train those who are using the tail-lift to do so safely
- Service your tail-lift to keep it safe and reliable
- Examine it; get a thorough examination report every six months
- Record all of the above and keep those records

Source: Tail-lift operators - a simple guide, IRIE best practice guide (2007)

has addressed the ambiguity issue. "We took the step, many years ago, of ensuring all our experienced technicians went on an independent LOLER inspection course, in order to give them some sort of credibility in this process," he explains. "Otherwise, how can you class someone as competent, just because they happen to have five years' experience of tail-lifts?"

"There are companies we deal with, including one of the local councils here in Hull, which continue to use us for LOLER inspections because they view it as an unbiased opinion," he adds. "If they were to use their own trained eyes and something was to happen to the lift, there might be question marks about whether the operator was impartial or not. The 'competent person' thing is very grey, and until something happens - such as a test case where a lift passes, only for it to fail afterwards, and it's very clear the person wasn't competent - it is a bit of a joke, quite frankly."

However, Reeder and Humberside Tail-lifts are very serious about training and ensuring the staff are at the required level internally, even if it is not recognised externally, or by LOLER. "Our opinion - and that of most tail-lift agents out there - is that until you've got a guy with at least 12 months'

experience and manufacturer training to repair a lift, they are not experienced enough or qualified to do so," he says. "We know there are many people out there who repair lifts who've had no formal training or proper experience. That is a great concern for us, but we see it all of the time: people have attempted repairs on the lift and often they are left dangerous."

Should or could the emphasis be more on the driver? Reeder isn't convinced. "With a tail-lift, there are only certain things you can check on a walk-round check, such as a safety catch for a column lift, or markers on the underside of the platform. But overall - from a safety aspect - what drivers could spot on their checks is minimal. If, for example, one of the lifting chains were to break and the lift crashes on the floor, that isn't something they would be able to spot themselves - that comes down to an inspection."

WHAT THE MANUFACTURER SAYS

It could be argued that, even though the organisation of the inspections is down to the end user, tail-lift manufacturers have a duty of care to stay in the loop. With this in mind, Andy Thiele explains DEL's efforts. He is aftersales director, UK and Central Europe at HIAB Tail-lift, its

corporate parent. He says: "We have a network of service agents - independent companies who are all approved and trained by us, and the majority of maintenance work is carried out by them. Or, if the customer is large enough to have its own workshops, it's done in-house. Generally, these agents will look after other makes of tail-lifts, and most do other services of components such as roller shutter doors or light bodywork as well."

DEL ensures that everyone who is carrying out work on its products is properly prepared. "For product-specific things, technicians come to us for training, depending on their background," explains Thiele. "From a LOLER perspective, more often than not they will come to us for a LOLER course specific to tail-lifts."

"To be considered a 'competent person' within the LOLER rules, they would need to come to us for training and to pass that training," confirms the DEL man. "There are a lot of insurance companies who carry out their own inspections and typically they have experience in LOLER. But as LOLER is not tail-lift specific, it is impossible to be a specialist in all of the areas that it covers."

As well as its repair network, DEL's end user customers also book courses. "We offer training for operation of the equipment, installation, repair, maintenance, LOLER training and also weight testing and other forms of specific training to meet customer requirements," Thiele states.

The DEL column-lift course includes basic maintenance, LOLER regulations, weight tests and basic repairs. It requires two years' experience, ideally working with tail-lifts, to be allowed to enrol on the day-long course.

Training is carried out at DEL's production facility, and was paused during the COVID-19 lockdown, but is now running again. [TE](#)